

Role of Ayurveda in Geriatric Nutrition¹

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ABSTRACT

Geriatrics is a branch of medicine that deals with elderly people, particularly in terms of health care. To become old is the natural process of the living organism. We all should have passed through the sequence of birth, aging, and death. "The total of all changes that occur in a living organism with time, leading to a declining ability to survive stress, functional impairment, and death" is how aging is defined. As we get older, the prevalence of sickness rises while our life expectancy falls. With age, the causes of illness and mortality grow as well. Nutritional deficiencies, climate variables, immunity, and hormonal factors all contributed to the acceleration of the aging process. All of these factors work together to hasten the aging process and lower the elderly's quality of life. In the current pandemic of COVID-19, the elderly are also more prone to the severity of illness and susceptible to disease. The elderly age group is more vulnerable to chronic inflammatory and degenerative illnesses such as Arthritis, Diabetes, Osteoporosis, Alzheimer's disease, Depression, Psychiatric disorders, Parkinson's disease, and age-related urine issues. The modern medical sciences also focus on geriatric health care and more and more advanced medical technique are now developed in the field of geriatrics. But still, the area of geriatric nutrition is unexplored and unfocused. *Ayurveda* defined the Role of *Ahara*(diet) as a preventive and therapeutic purpose and mentioned *Ahara* as *Mahabhaisajaya*.

Keywords: *Geriatrics; Ahara; Nutrition; Ayurveda.*

INTRODUCTION

*Vridhāvastha*¹ is a term used by *Ayurveda* to describe the last phase of a person's life (old age), which is characterized by degenerative changes. *Vridhāvastha* or *Jirnavastha* (old age) is the period after 60 or 70 years as per *Charaka*² and *Sushruta Samhita*³. This stage is marked by physical degradation, *Dhatu* (a variety of anatomical tissues), *Indriya* (sensory and motor organs) perceptual power, potency, strength, speech, and a variety of mental and cognitive activities (e.g., memory, intellect, reception, retention, analytic ability, etc.). During this time, *Vata Dosha* holds the upper hand (one of the three physiological body factors). Wrinkling of the skin, greying of the hair, baldness, and a decreased capacity to conduct strenuous work are the most noticeable physical changes at this time. *Kasa* (cough), *Shwasa* (asthma), and other disorders might make this stage more difficult.

Geriatrics is a branch of medicine that deals with elderly people, particularly in terms of health care⁴. To become old is the natural process of the living organism. The growing global population of the elderly (those aged 65 and up), which will account for one-fifth of the global population by 2050, has led to the development of a new specialty of medicine known as geriatrics⁵. As per a 2017 estimate by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), by 2030, over 12.5 percent of India's population would be 60 years or older, escalating to one-fifth of the population in 2050⁶. As we get older, the prevalence of sickness rises while our life expectancy falls. Even in the absence of disease, sickness, environmental dangers, or bad lifestyle choices, aging refers to the unavoidable, permanent reduction in organ function that happens over time (eg, unhealthy diet, lack of exercise, substance abuse). Initially, alterations in

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organ function have little effect on baseline function; the first signs are a decrease in each organ's ability to maintain homeostasis under stress. The cardiovascular, renal, and central neurological systems are the most commonly affected.

In old age, *Ayurveda* offers the ability to prevent diseases, premature aging, and disease management through preventative, personalized, and therapeutic techniques. The *Ayurveda*, perspective of geriatric care⁷ is a unique approach to slowing down the aging process and reducing the severity of problems that arise during this stage of life. The present review focused on Ayurvedic understanding of geriatrics, role of *ayurveda* in geriatric nutrition, its prevention and management.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

References related to understand the concept of nutrition, aging in perspective to ayurveda were gathered from numerous textbooks, published research papers, and previous work, and then compiled. Ayurvedic geriatric nutrition concept and process were thoroughly investigated.

Prevention and management of aging

Ayurveda includes a broad range of preventative and therapeutic strategies for battling the aging process which includes dietary and lifestyle modification, several plant-based medications, formulations, and, in particular, *Rasayana*⁸ treatment (rejuvenating modality) for general well-being and disease-specific geriatric disorders.

Aging can be slowed down by:

- By following the concepts of *Dincharya* (daily regimen) in your daily routine, such as *Anjana* (eye care); *Abhayanga* (body massage), especially *Shiro-Abhayanga* (head massage); *nasya* (oily nasal drops); *Sneha-Gandusha* (mouth oil retention); foot and external orifice cleansing; exercise; etc.
- Seasonal changes bring about changes and they may be prevented by adopting a seasonal regimen called *Ritucharya*. The diet and lifestyle modifications as per seasonal prevent from various avoidable diseases and maintain the equilibrium of dosha essential of the natural aging process.
- By following the other *Swasthavritta* principles, such as using *Tryopastambha* (diet, sleep, and coitus) according to the rules; to bear suppressible urges (i.e., mental fluctuations) and expel un-suppressible urges (i.e., natural urges); regular removal of aggravated *Dosha* according to *Ritu* (season) by *Panchakarma*; regular use of *Rasayana*.
- Taking a diet strictly following the prescribed rules.
- If an illness persists or appears, seek treatment as soon as possible.

So overall, Diet and lifestyle have a huge impact on the aging process.

Role of Nutrition in Geriatrics:

According to *Ayurveda*, the body's growth, development, and maintenance are completely dependent on four factors: *Kala* (time), *Swabhava* (nature), diet (which should be excellent in terms of nutrients), and the absence of obstructive factors in the growth and development of the body⁹. Diet is one of the most important of these because it nourishes *Dhatu* and is responsible for its compactness, strength, and production of an ideal form of *Dhatu*. There is vitiation of Tridosha when the diet is defective in terms of *Gramya-Ahara* (a deficient and unplanned diet) and when the norms governing nutrition and lifestyle are not followed, which leads to different progressive pathological changes¹⁰. These pathological changes include loss of muscle compactness, joint looseness, vitiation of *Rakta* (blood), excessive production of *Meda* (fatty tissue), failure of *Majja* (marrow) accumulation in bones, failure of *Shukra* (semen), and loss of *Oja* (vital factor), all of which accelerate the process of premature aging. When all the rules of a healthy and planned diet are not followed in old ages, making the person susceptible to various diseases in terms of combinable and non-communicable and preventing him/her from living out his/her full lifespan.

Ayurvedic Dietetics in Geriatrics:

The nutritional requirements of the elderly differ from those of adults. People become more vulnerable to nutritional deficiency as they get older due to a variety of unavoidable factors such as anorexia, medication for various age-related disorders, dementia, depression, poor dentition, delayed gastric emptying, swallowing disorders, and decreased

taste and smell sensation. In comparison to adults, older persons have a slower response to thirst. As a result, fluid intake is required to restore physiological losses, improve digestion, intestinal function, and renal clearance. In old age, vitamin D and calcium absorption are decreased, resulting in insufficiency. The elderly are more likely to suffer from folic acid insufficiency.

The elderly's food should be customized to their environment, season, and age, among other factors. The diet should be well-balanced, and the amount consumed should be appropriate for the individual's digestive ability¹¹. When creating a nutritional regimen for the elderly, the following considerations should be kept in mind:

- Diet should be warm, fresh, tasty, nutritious, and oily, according to the *ahara vidhi vidhana* rule.
- Foods that are very spicy, salty, or pungent should be avoided because they aggravate *vata*.
- The dish should not be served excessively cold.
- More liquid should be consumed regularly and as needed.
- At night, heavy foods should be avoided. Two or three hours before bedtime is the ideal time for a night meal. It is preferable to advise a short walk after dinner.
- While eating, the mind should be peaceful.
- Eat only when hungry and don't overeat.
- Dairy products, legumes, nuts, eggs, and other calcium and vitamin D-rich foods must be included in the diet.
- Calcium supplements may also be provided in the form of herbal-mineral formulations such as *Praval Pishti*, *Pravala Panchamarita*, *Kukkutandatwaka Bhasma*, *Sankha Bhasama*, and *Kaparda Bhasama*.
- Provide a diet rich in beans, grains, veggies, and fruits.
- Vegetable soup and fruit juice daily are added to the diet.
- For *Dhatu Poshana*, *Jivantishaka*, *Punarnava Shaka*, *Shatavari*, and *Shringataka Kanda* can be included in the diet. *Varahi Kanda*, *Kharjura*, *Akshota*, *Mrdvika*, and other nutritious herbs can be added.
- Diet should be converted into suitable dietary nutritive forms like *Lehya* for convenient administration in old age.
- In old age, *Vaya Sthapana Mahakashya* can be used as a nutraceutical.
- *Virudhahara* should be avoided.
- In healthy elderly people, milk and ghee are recommended.
- Easily digestible *sattvika* diet for old age peoples should be included in the diet.

CONCLUSION

Ayurveda views aging as a normal and unavoidable process that may be managed with time-tested remedies. Healthy aging, then incorporating healthy lifestyle behaviors and routines that promote excellent health and well-being. Ayurvedic principles of Nutrition and Diet must be followed for the maintenance of hemostasis of *Dosha* and *Dhatu Samyta* in old age individuals. Ayurveda through its unique holistic approach plays a magnificent role in providing proper nutrition in the geriatric population and helping them to cope with the disorders due to age.

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